

Public Health

Seattle & King County Fact Sheet

Measles (Rubeola)

❑ WHAT IS IT?

Measles is a serious infection that spreads very easily from person-to-person. It is caused by the measles virus.

❑ SYMPTOMS

Symptoms of measles begin 10-12 days after contact with an infected person. Symptoms include:

- ✓ Fever (often high), fatigue, runny nose, cough, and watery red eyes.
- ✓ After 2 or 3 days, tiny white spots may appear in the mouth.
- ✓ After 2 more days, a raised, red rash starts on the face and spreads down the body and out to the arms and legs. The rash usually lasts 4 to 7 days.
- ✓ Symptoms usually last from 1 to 2 weeks.
- ✓ Measles is contagious for about 1 week before to 1 week after the rash begins.
- ✓ Serious complication of measles can occur, see COMPLICATIONS, below.

❑ HOW IS IT SPREAD?

- ✓ Measles is spread from person-to-person by infected droplets from the mouth, nose and throat of a person with measles.
- ✓ Infected droplets can be spread through the air or directly onto other person's hands and face through coughing and sneezing.
- ✓ People who have measles should stay away from others until at least 4 full days have passed since the time the rash first appeared.

❑ COMPLICATIONS OF MEASLES

- ✓ Prior to the introduction of vaccine in the early 60's, there were about 3 to 4 million cases of measles, causing 3,000 deaths, each year in the U.S. In 1990, there were about 28,000 cases of measles and 30 deaths. Virtually *all* of these cases occurred in unimmunized people.
- ✓ Currently, there are about 300-500 cases of measles each year and almost no reported deaths.
- ✓ Serious complications from measles infection are quite possible, whereas the chance of serious side effects from the measles vaccine is practically zero. The immediate benefit of the measles vaccine clearly outweighs the risk.
- ✓ Complications of measles infection include pneumonia, ear infection, diarrhea, and rarely, encephalitis (brain infection).
- ✓ One to three of every 1000 people who get measles in the United States will die from the disease, usually from pneumonia. Death is more common in infants, in malnourished children and those who have weakened immune systems, including those with leukemia and HIV infection.
- ✓ Measles in pregnant women can cause miscarriages and premature delivery.

**Report all cases to the Health Department
by calling (206) 296 - 4774.**

❑ WHO IS AT RISK?

- ✓ Infants less than one year of age who are too young to have been immunized.
- ✓ Immunocompromised people.
- ✓ Persons who received immune globulin less than three months before they received measles vaccine.
- ✓ Persons who were vaccinated with an inactivated vaccine (available from 1963-1967), and have not been revaccinated.
- ✓ ***Any person who has not had measles infection or been vaccinated against measles.***

People born before 1957 are generally considered immune because they probably had the disease before measles vaccine was widely used.

❑ PREVENTION

- ✓ Measles can be prevented through vaccination. Washington State Immunization Law requires that all children have a record of immunization against measles or documentation of exemption for a specific reason.
- ✓ Measles vaccine is usually given to toddlers when they are 12 to 15 months of age, and then again at 4 to 6 years of age.
- ✓ The measles vaccine is combined with the vaccines for mumps and rubella and is known as the MMR vaccine.

❑ WHAT CAN I DO IF I AM EXPOSED TO MEASLES DISEASE?

- ✓ If you are exposed to someone who has measles, consult your health care provider immediately. For unvaccinated people exposed to measles, measles vaccine can help prevent infection if given within three days of exposure.
- ✓ Immune Globulin (IG) is another medication that can be given to prevent or modify measles in a susceptible person if given within 6 days of exposure.
 - IG is usually given to susceptible household contacts of patients with measles at high risk for complications, particularly children younger than 1 year of age, pregnant women, and immunocompromised persons.
 - IG is not used for household contacts who have received 1 dose of measles vaccine at 12 months of age or older *unless they are immunocompromised.*